



The Commitments You Chose, Ky

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English

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| 1 Date I first read these Commitments all the way through (and started regularly referring to them): | _____ |
| 2 Date I gave a copy of these Commitments to at least one other important person in this process (for example, a counselor, mediator, attorney or key family member): | _____ |
| 3 Date we as parents read and discussed these Commitments with each other, if necessary with the help of a counselor, clergy person, mediator, or other trusted person: | _____ |
| 4 Name of the supportive person I have asked to be my "coach" in observing these Commitments: | _____ |

- Section I - Noticing Sadie and Noah's Many Important Needs.
- Section II - Realizing That Building Peace for Sadie and Noah Helps Us as Well.
- Section III - Making Our Relationships with Sadie and Noah as Wonderful as Possible.
- Section IV - Supporting Our Children's Good Relationship with Each of Us.
- Section V - Showing Sadie and Noah They Can Be Proud of Their Family.
- Section VI - Becoming Healthier and Happier—for Sadie and Noah's Sake and Our Own.
- Section VII - Being Open to a Better Way of Looking at Our Circumstances.
- Section VIII - Asking the Questions That Actually Help Us.
- Section IX - Understanding the Different Ways to Co-Parent.
- Section X - Choosing Our Co-Parenting Path.
- Section XI - Educating Friends and Family on This Better Way.
- Section XII - Inviting Real Help In, Keeping Hazards Out.
- Section XIII - Bringing Our Best to This Challenging Time.
- Section XIV - Doing Well Right Away.

SECTION I: NOTICING SADIE AND NOAH'S MANY IMPORTANT NEEDS.

1 We remember this is Sadie and Noah's one and only childhood.

Never will a time come when the most marvelous recent invention is as marvelous as a newborn baby.
—Carl Sandburg

2 We remember this one and only childhood is forming many of the gifts and problems that will follow Sadie and Noah into adulthood.

3 We notice and care about the deep losses Sadie and Noah may be feeling, including:

- Losing the hope of growing up in one home with both their parents.
- Feeling there was something they were supposed to fix.
- Living a "life of leaving" (leaving behind one of us each time they're reunited with the other).
- Wondering what else in their lives can go wrong.

These are enough, and our wish is to reduce their losses, not add to them.

4 As much as ever, Sadie and Noah need:

- The best possible relationship with each of us.
- Peace between their parents.
- To see us growing happier and more capable in handling our adult issues and responsibilities, including resolutions that bring peace into their lives.
- Our help as they deal with their losses, fears, and grief.
- Our support of their other important relationships, including those with grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, and other important family and friends.

5 These child needs are truly enormous—and they require our full attention and energy. There's no room for wasting time, energy, or money on unhelpful conflict.

6 And we remember that all these needs have one important thing in common: only we—Sadie and Noah's parents—can fully meet them.

SECTION II: REALIZING THAT BUILDING PEACE FOR SADIE AND NOAH HELPS US AS WELL.

7 Our own happiness depends on knowing we've done well for Sadie and Noah, their childhood, and their peace of mind.

8 Co-parents who build peace for their children get to live in that peace themselves. **Peace for children is success for parents.**

9 Sadie and Noah are the very definition of our new relationship. They're the reason we will always have a relationship—and that the quality of that relationship will always matter so much.

Those who bring sunshine to the lives of others cannot keep it from themselves.
—James Barrie

10 We know that often children in Sadie and Noah's circumstances don't say a lot about their hurt or needs. So, we put ourselves in their shoes and fill out [Exercise A](#) below asking about them and how they're doing.

SECTION III: MAKING OUR RELATIONSHIPS WITH SADIE AND NOAH AS WONDERFUL AS POSSIBLE.

- 11 We make joy a cornerstone of our relationships with Sadie and Noah. We continue the fun things we used to do with them—and add some more.

Parents' highest obligation is to enjoy their children.
—Dr. Timothy Onkka

- 12 Also at this important time, we regularly let Sadie and Noah know how much we admire them.

- 13 We let Sadie and Noah know (a) that they will have lots of time with each of us and (b) that they can often call the parent they're not with.

If a child is to keep his inborn sense of wonder, he needs the companionship of at least one adult who can share it, rediscovering with him the joy, excitement, and mystery of the world we live in.
—Rachel Carson

- 14 We allow Sadie and Noah to talk with us about their feelings, including the sadness and fear they may feel over their family's circumstances.

- 15 Sadie and Noah's only job is to be children. And they can't be children unless we're adults.

- Our children are not our witnesses or allies in any of our disagreements; it's **our responsibility** to reach good agreements **for them**.
- Our children are not our spies to find out about each other's personal life.
- Our children are not our whipping posts; it's not their job to listen to us criticize each other.
- Our children are not our messengers to deliver checks, bills, messages, or anything else.
- Our children are not our counselors or confidants to help us with our hurt.

- 16 When Sadie and Noah try to take on any of these responsibilities, we smile and say:

"Mom and Dad have that all taken care of. You just get back to being great kids—you do it so well."

Your children are not your children. They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself. You may give them your love but not your thoughts, for they may have their own thoughts. You may house their bodies but not their souls, for their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow, a place you cannot visit, not even in your dreams.

—Kahlil Gibran, *The Prophet*

- 17 In our interaction with Sadie and Noah, it will be up to us:

- To make clear to them that our divorce had **absolutely nothing to do with them**;
- To help them understand that it's solely our responsibility to solve our problems;
- To shield them completely from the legal and financial details of our circumstances;
- To show them that while we're not together, we'll always be their parents, we'll always love and support them, and we'll **do so together**.

SECTION IV: SUPPORTING OUR CHILDREN'S GOOD RELATIONSHIP WITH EACH OF US.

- 18 Sadie and Noah need a good relationship with each of us. The best parent is both parents.

- 19 We communicate and maturely work out our schedules so Sadie and Noah can have quality time with each of us and can enjoy special occasions in both their homes.

To a child's ears, any comment about his parent—positive or negative—is a judgment of him.
—M. Gary Neuman

20 We look at all possible ways—large and small—to support Sadie and Noah's good relationships with both of us. We start today by:

- Stopping all criticism of each other.
- Using respect and courtesy, regardless of how we feel we've been treated.
- Celebrating things Sadie and Noah get to do with each of us.
- Regularly encouraging Sadie and Noah to call their other parent when they're with us.

21 To Sadie and Noah, we call each other "Mom," "Dad," "Mommy," or "Daddy," not "your mom," "your dad," "your mother," or "your father."

22 To Sadie and Noah we consistently speak well of each other. We complete [Exercise B](#) by making a list of 10 specific compliments and good memories about each other to share with Sadie and Noah. When we speak to Sadie and Noah about each other, these are the things we speak about.

SECTION V: SHOWING SADIE AND NOAH THEY CAN BE PROUD OF THEIR FAMILY.

23 Sadie and Noah would experience any attack between us as an attack on them.

Children have no defense against their parents' anger.

—Dr. Ross Campbell

24 We realize conflict between us (their parents) can bring many bad things into Sadie and Noah's lives. Here are just a few:

- a. Blaming themselves.
- b. Fear and depression.
- c. Hiding their feelings.
- d. Failure in school.
- e. Drugs and alcohol.
- f. Dangerous relationships.

25 We remember that what we show Sadie and Noah we think of each other will powerfully impact what they think of themselves. They can't be proud of themselves if they are embarrassed about how their parents relate with each other or speak of each other.

The studies are absolutely clear on one point: Conflict between parents is the best predictor of a child's later maladjustment.

—Dr. Anthony L. Berardi

26 Realizing people can't argue anyone into agreeing with them, we simply don't argue with each other.

27 We avoid criticizing each other. To move forward, we accept each other as we are and build a partnership based on our mutual love for Sadie and Noah, the best interests we share in common, and our many parenting strengths.

28 We remember that simple courtesy is almost always the best form of communication and persuasion.

29 Separated and divorced parents have dozens of chances each week to talk when their children aren't around. There's no reason for them to talk about difficult issues around their children.

30

Any and all times that Sadie and Noah see us together or hear us speaking ***belong to them***. They are for exchanging them, handling other "child tasks," and showing them that their world is safe. We read and sign the Child Safety Zone Pledge.

- a. For parents with more than one child together, click [HERE](#).
- b. For parents with a daughter together, click [HERE](#).
- c. For parents with a son together, click [HERE](#).

- 31 As long as we're mature and peaceful enough, we can plan together important discussions we have with Sadie and Noah—and even have those discussions with them together.
- 32 And as long as our interaction is consistently positive, we can give Sadie and Noah the gift of seeing us do more things together (for example, attending together school functions, sports and club events, and birthday parties).
- 33 In truth, we very much want to protect Sadie and Noah. We complete [Exercise C](#) below for ideas on how to best handle all times they see us together.
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SECTION VI: BECOMING HEALTHIER AND HAPPIER—FOR SADIE AND NOAH'S SAKE AND OUR OWN.

- 34 We forgive ourselves—and each other—for past mistakes. In fact, with so much personal hurt and public misinformation about separation and divorce, serious mistakes were probably unavoidable.

No one ever told me that grief felt so much like fear.
—C. S. Lewis

- 35 We give ourselves credit for every time we act wisely and lovingly.

- 36 We keep our sights on the future we're building, not on things in the past that didn't work out. We become guided not by today's hurt, anger, or fear, but by what we consider are the consequences of our actions weeks and years from now.

Our task now is not to fix the blame for the past, but to fix the course for the future.
—John F. Kennedy

- 37 No matter how long our grieving takes, we are honest in facing our own losses from our divorce. And we never use anger as a way of trying to deny those losses.

- 38 We work to remember that people's feelings are the result not of the events in their lives, but the thoughts they have about those events.

It's not what happens to us, but our response to what happens to us that hurts us.
—Stephen Covey

- 39 To succeed in our current and future challenges, we practice changing unhelpful feelings by choosing new ways to think about events. Thoughts like, "Look at the many opportunities I have in my life" may serve us a lot better than, "Look how poorly I've been treated."

Every day we do something to grow a little stronger:

- *Time with good friends,*
- *Time with a healthy group,*
- *Time with people succeeding in their co-parenting,*
- *If necessary, some child-focused counseling to help our cooperation,*
- *Volunteer work, a hobby, or class,*
- *Having some fun,*
- *Exercise,*

and, of course,

- *Enjoying and celebrating Sadie and Noah!*

- 41 In everything we do, we help Sadie and Noah by showing them that we're growing happier, healthier, and more capable.

SECTION VII: BEING OPEN TO A BETTER WAY OF LOOKING AT OUR CIRCUMSTANCES.

- 42 We're open to the possibility that many of the lessons society teaches about separation and divorce may be quite wrong.

We don't see things as they are, we see them as we are.

—Anais Nin

- 43 We become open to the possibility that people who speak of separation and divorce as cases, conflicts, or disputes are quite mistaken. A much better view is that separation and divorce are collections of painful losses to be faced and new opportunities to be acted on.

- 44 We remember we have the same children—and that we'll win together if we give Sadie and Noah a good childhood, or we'll lose together if parent conflict poisons their childhood.

The most important measure of how good a game I played was how much better I helped my teammates play.

—Bill Russell

- 45 We're open to the message that our best interests are actually the same. We recall—again and again—it's in the best interests of both of us:

- to save our money,
- to save our peace of mind,
- to save our chance to make our own decisions, and most important,
- to save Sadie and Noah's childhood.

- 46 We adopt a language about our circumstances that reminds us how we can help our children and ourselves.

- a. We aren't "parties" or "opposing parties"; we're **co-parents** responsible to build peace for our children and, as a result, peace for ourselves.
 - b. We're not "adversaries" or "litigants" seeking victory against each other; we're **partners** with a mutual interest in preserving our best interests, especially a good childhood for our children.
 - c. We don't have a "case," "dispute," or "conflict"; we have **deep losses** to face and **important opportunities** to notice and act on.
 - d. We are doing something better than "arguing," "negotiating," or even "settling issues"; we're **creating a new future** based on meeting our children's needs and the many best interests we share in common.
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SECTION VIII: ASKING THE QUESTIONS THAT ACTUALLY HELP US.

- 47 With this much better understanding of the actual challenges and opportunities before us, we can ask the questions that actually help us.
- 48 Here are 7 important examples of our better questions—ones that can help save Sadie and Noah and ourselves.

Questions we know to avoid

“What’s the best argument I can make to show I’m right?”

“How can I be the winning parent?”

“How can I be the preferred parent in our children’s eyes?”

“How can I win a dispute about (for example) parenting time?”

“How can I broadcast my hurt to as many people as possible for as long as possible?”

“How can I get people to see how hard life is on me?”

“How can we just end our relationship?”

Questions we ask instead

“What are Sadie and Noah’s greatest needs today, and how can I help meet those needs as a path to everyone winning?”

“How can everyone—starting with Sadie and Noah—win?”

“How can I make our children proud of their entire family?”

“What arrangements can we make to give Sadie and Noah quality time with both their parents—and in a way that shows their parents working maturely together?”

“Where can I get help for these painful feelings, so I can move ahead?”

“How can I better see the many opportunities in my life?”

“Because having children together means we’ll always have a relationship, how do we build a new relationship based on peacefully meeting their needs and ours?”

- 49 Whenever we seem to be locked in a disagreement, we check to be sure we’re asking the right questions. With our overwhelmingly mutual best interests, we should always be able to reach peaceful agreements if we’re asking the right questions.

SECTION IX: UNDERSTANDING THE DIFFERENT WAYS TO CO-PARENT.

- 50 No one way of co-parenting can work for all families and, fortunately, there are different ways we can choose from.
- 51 It’s our responsibility to find what can work best in our circumstances and to successfully put that into place.

One day Alice came to a fork in the road and saw a Cheshire cat in a tree. “Which road do I take?” she asked. “Where do you want to go?” was his response. “I don’t know,” Alice answered. “Then,” said the cat, “it doesn’t matter.”

—Lewis Carroll **Alice in Wonderland**

Especially if there are ongoing problems in our interaction, we notice there are at least six kinds of relationships co-parents can choose from.

- i. **Reconciliation-Interested** (parents work together for their children and keep open the possibility of reconciliation).
- ii. **Friendship** (parents permanently separate but maintain a friendship and co-parent together in relaxed and friendly ways).
- iii. **Cooperatively Separate** (parents aren't necessarily good friends but co-parent cooperatively and courteously).
- iv. **Parallel Parenting** (parents have trouble with their interaction so co-parent with very limited interaction and conversation between them).
- v. **Supervision Required** (due to high levels of conflict or even danger, courts play an important role in monitoring parents' interaction).
- vi. **Sole Parenting** (one parent, by choice or circumstance, has become mostly absent from children's lives).

53 We next notice that there are two different ways co-parents can make the major decisions about their children's schooling, medical care, counseling, and religious upbringing.

- One way is to make those decisions together, meaning in the same cooperative and respectful way that happily married parents use (what can be called "Joint Decision-Making").
- The other way is for one parent to make those decisions (what can be called "Sole Decision-Making").

54 We accept that "Joint Decision-Making" can work very well if parents are ready, willing, and able to cooperate and communicate respectfully. We accept that parents using Joint Decision-Making must:

- a. Avoid making important child decisions alone,
- b. See each other's ideas as assets rather than annoyances, and
- c. Use mature discussions and give-and-take to reach agreements and implement them together.

55 We accept that "Sole Decision-Making" is often the better choice for parents who don't communicate and cooperate respectfully.

SECTION X: CHOOSING OUR CO-PARENTING PATH.

56 We honestly evaluate Sadie and Noah's best interests, our present co-parenting relationship, and our ability and willingness to work together in the future.

57 Based on that honest evaluation, we choose the type of co-parenting relationship we will use and whether or not we will be making major child decisions together.

If you don't know where you're going, you'll end up someplace else.

—Yogi Berra

58 Whatever choice we make, *we work hard to make that co-parenting work—for our children's sake and our own.*

59 Finally, we consider whether the use of court would likely support or damage the best interests of Sadie and Noah—and ourselves.

60 We recognize that some family circumstances are so dangerous that use of court may be an important part of a plan that protects a parent or child.

61

We recognize that a few other family circumstances, while not physically dangerous, may call for use of court if measures like child-focused discussion and mediation simply cannot work. These circumstances may include:

- a. A parent's unreasonable refusal to allow the other parent proper access to the children, or
- b. A parent's unreasonable refusal to live up to required financial obligations.

62 However, we also recognize that unless parents have a relationship so troubled that this kind of court supervision is required, there can be serious costs to using court for issues they could safely and maturely resolve themselves. For example:

- a. A judge can only pick from the bad choices left in the midst of parents' conflict, while parents can often create better choices.
- b. Relying on court and legal rights can lead otherwise capable parents to believe they're unable to handle their parenting responsibilities.
- c. Resolutions aren't always available from courts; instead, legal battles can lead to more legal battles.
- d. Healing usually isn't available from courts; in fact, legal battles can create more resentment, hurt, and distrust.
- e. Legal battles can drain finances and energy that parents need for other things.

It is more difficult to organize a peace than to win a war; but actual victory will be lost if the peace is not organized.

—Aristotle

63 If we have trouble in succeeding with whatever arrangement we choose, we reach out for any help we need. Depending on our circumstances, this could include:

- a. Individual counseling,
- b. Co-parenting counseling together,
- c. Child-focused mediation, or
- d. Time and discussions with mature acquaintances who have succeeded in peacefully co-parenting from their separate homes.

I find the great thing in this world is not so much where we stand, as in what direction we are moving . . . [W]e must sail sometimes with the wind and sometimes against it, but we must sail, and not drift, nor lie at anchor.

—Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr.,
United States Supreme Court Justice

SECTION XI: EDUCATING FRIENDS AND FAMILY ON THIS BETTER WAY.

64 We will remember that by the time we finish this website work, we may already have a *much better* idea than most people about how to build a good separation or divorce.

65 People who honestly care about us may still be caught in the myth that parents who aren't together should fight with each other.

66 We have every right to ask friends and family for the kind of child-focused support that actually helps Sadie and Noah and ourselves.

Things didn't really get better until we insisted our families respect our decision to move forward. Things improved so much then. I think they wanted to do better, but they needed to hear it from us.
—37-year-old mother of two

- 67 We ask all the important adults in our lives (for example, our parents and any new partners) to read the Commitments we choose on this website—and we discuss with them why we need their consistent support.
- 68 If our marriage is definitely over, we accept that new partners will come into each of our lives—and we peaceably make room for those relationships.
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SECTION XII: INVITING REAL HELP IN, KEEPING HAZARDS OUT.

- 69 These are *our* children, and we owe it to them and ourselves to have only constructive influences in their world.
- 70 Before we hire any professionals (counselors, mediators, attorneys, or others), we show them the Commitments we've chosen on this website and ask directly if they will help us achieve those Commitments and build peace between us.
- 71 We refuse to become involved with any professional who believes that our separation is a call for us to be in a personal or legal conflict against each other.
- 72 We each reach out to find at least one special Guide, a wise friend or family member who will (a) read the Commitments we chose, (b) help us live by them, and (c) honor the things we're doing right.
- 73 We spend more and more time with people who help us to see that we can move forward by recognizing (a) Sadie and Noah's need for peace between us and (b) the many interests we share in common.

Unhappy the land that is in need of heroes.
—Bertolt Brecht

SECTION XIII: BRINGING OUR BEST TO THIS CHALLENGING TIME.

- 74 Wherever our personal values come from, we stay in close touch with those traditions in order to bring peace and kindness into Sadie and Noah's lives.
- 75 Sadie and Noah are entitled to everything they need even if we don't get what we want. We work to meet their needs even when it's hardest on us.

Being brave is the hardest thing.
—Annie Rose, age 6

- 76 We use our co-parent's failures as a reason to do even better, not as an excuse for Sadie and Noah to be hurt further.

77

When we feel our co-parent is failing to build peace, we remember we still can—and must—avoid these six mistakes (“**The Nix Six**”) ourselves.

- i. I don’t argue with my co-parent.
- ii. I don’t hold onto old resentments.
- iii. I don’t look on my co-parent as my opponent in anything.
- iv. I don’t look to my legal rights to solve what could be solved by common sense and my love for Sadie and Noah.
- v. I don’t do anything that creates unnecessary insecurity or suspicion in my co-parent.
- vi. I don’t forget my good integrity, sense of humor, or love for Sadie and Noah.

78 And we remember we can—and must—use these six keys instead: (“**The Fix Six**”).

- i. I enjoy and admire Sadie and Noah.
- ii. I observe the Child Safety Zone—making all times when Sadie and Noah see us (their parents) together or hear us speaking **entirely positive**.
- iii. I regularly share with Sadie and Noah good things about their other parent.
- iv. I celebrate with Sadie and Noah what they get to do with their other parent.
- v. I regularly and cheerfully encourage Sadie and Noah to call their other parent.
- vi. I promptly share all child-related information with my co-parent.

Click [The Nix Six and The Fix Six](#) for a one-page copy of these powerful ideas.

For a while when my spouse was pouring conflict into our children's lives, I used that as an excuse to fight, too. I finally realized that the worse my co-parent was doing, the better I had to do. Not only did my kids love me for being the bigger person, but my spouse started doing better too.
—32-year-old father of three

79 We complete [Exercise D](#) below to describe how we want to be relating years from now.

SECTION XIV: DOING WELL RIGHT AWAY.

80 “**The Nix Six**” and “**The Fix Six**” serve one other very important function. They are things each of us can do *starting right now*. We put these twelve ideas in effect immediately to get off to the best start possible.

81 As we look over the lessons we’ve learned, we realize that the things Sadie and Noah most need (for example, a good relationship with each of us and peace between us) are things only we can provide.

82 We choose from a range of additional things we can begin to do better and better.

- i. Copying the Commitments we choose on this website and periodically looking them over for ideas on improvement.
- ii. Visiting the “Articles and Videos” page on this website for more ideas and encouragement.
- iii. Signing up on the “Join the Conversation” link on this website.
- iv. Teaching these ideas to at least one or two other parents we think could use them.

83 Wherever we are in this journey, for our children's sake and our own, we use today to do better than yesterday. Because today is all we have.